ALERT

News from the UFMCC
on AIDS Legislation, Education, Research and Treatment.

March 1994

Rev. Shelley Hamilton, Coordinator of Health Ministries in Dallas

The Cathedral of Hope MCC in Dallas, TX, USA, has hired the Rev. Shelley Hamilton as their Coordinator of Health Ministries and AIDS Chaplain. Rev. Hamilton was hired to develop a wholistic program of health ministries for women and men. Her goal is to develop a wellness center, where the integration of mind, body and spirit is facilitated.

At this point, a major component of this program is AIDS Ministry, but the goal of the church is to make the program more wholistic. Sixty percent of her salary comes from a grant for AIDS ministry. When the Cathedral is able to build a wellness center, Rev. Hamilton asserts, "This won't diminish our services to people with AIDS."

Rev. Hamilton and her spouse, Valda Lewis, arrived in Dallas in September of 1993. The Cathedral of Hope aggressively sought Rev. Hamilton. "They are helping me go back to school, they paid for our move and our first month's rent, and they hired Valda as the Director of Media Ministry. Rev. Michael Piazza (pastor of the Cathedral of Hope) and Randy Sprabary even drove the truck to move us!"

The Cathedral is keeping Rev. Hamilton busy. "I do a tremendous amount of pastoral work. I do a lot of intakes in homes and hospitals; I manage the volunteer care teams and train them. I have a pastoral contact with a lot of people we serve. And I develop programs around AIDS ministry and wellness ministry. One of the things I'll be doing is developing food programs for our food service department, which will guide people to more wholistic eating patterns."

Rev. Shelley Hamilton

Currently, Rev. Hamilton's program serves about 500 clients, mostly men, and mostly white, although they do serve

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MCC San Diego Hires Ms. Kaki Johnson, New AIDS Ministry Coordinator

MCC San Diego has proudly announced the addition of Ms. Kaki Johnson as their new AIDS Ministry Coordinator. In her position, she will be conducting a needs assessment, as well as ensuring that persons living with HIV/AIDS are referred to appropriate pastoral contacts. She is also networking with community AIDS service organizations, and she facilitates the church's "Friends for Life" support group for people living with HIV/AIDS. She also serves as the church's receptionist.

"My most important focus is to assess this church body in terms of AIDS services," says Ms. Johnson. In determining what the congregation wants to give and receive, she is preparing a survey with open-ended questions. The survey will go out in the April newsletter. Ms. Johnson anticipates determining the church's focus for AIDS Ministry during May, based on the survey results.

While it is not part of her job description to provide for pastoral needs, it is her job to make sure the person in need is referred to the appropriate pastoral staff person. She reports that Rev. Donna Eubanks has done quite a lot of counseling with persons living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, four deacons work hard at providing home care, transportation, and social interaction for people who need it.

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Ms. Kaki Johnson...

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Ms. Johson has been going to a number of AIDS service agencies in San Diego, not only to find out what services they provide, but to make the agencies' personnel aware of MCC San Diego and what they can provide.

MCC San Diego has lost a tremendous number of people to the complications of HIV. Ms. Johnson senses some resistence in the church to hearing more about the issue. "I hear comments like, 'I don't want to hear about this anymore.' We've lost a lot of people here. It takes a toll."

Ms. Kaki Johnson

Kaki Johnson has been active with MCC San Diego for a year, and became a member in November. Prior to coming to MCC, she was trained in prayer ministry through Unity in San Diego, and has established her own non-denominational prayer ministry. Previously, she worked in a drug and alcohol prevention program at the University of Arizona. ▼

Clarification on Northeast District AIDS Benefit

Frank M. Moreno, the Treasurer of the Northeast District, has notified ALERT that there were some inaccuracies in ALERT's January, 1994 article about the Northeast District's benefit for HIV/AIDS ministries. He writes:

"Last year the benefit concert proceeds were divided to benefit two local churches both of which are very active in AIDS ministry. Part of the money was given to Open Arms MCC in Rochester to assist persons living with AIDS and their families who are in financial crisis. The rest of the money was designated to MCC New York to support their HIV/AIDS coloring book for children as part of their AIDS education efforts.

"This year, no decision has been reached as to which local church is to benefit from the AIDS concert proceeds.

"The first District Committee meeting for this year is scheduled for February 19, 1994. One of the items on the agenda is our need to contact all our local churches in writing, to notify them of the available funds for AIDS ministry, and encourage them to apply for funding before the given deadline. The District Committee will review and discuss each application to determine how we can make better use of the AIDS Ministry funds."

ALERT regrets the error in reporting, and we are grateful for the correct information. ▼

Free Technical Assistance from Jackson State University

The National Alumni AIDS Prevention Project (NAAPP) of Jackson State University is providing "capacity-building technical assistance and training to minority community-based organizations and other agencies serving racial and ethnic minorities at risk for HIV/STD. Free services include: Grant writing and review; Resource development; Strategies on how to network and collaborate; Strategies for effective information dissemination; Needs assessment development; Program evaluation and assessment.

The NAAPP has an estimated 40 volunteers in 27 states in the U.S. All services are free and provided anywhere (providing availability of budgeted travel money). The Project may be reached by calling 601/968-2519; or write NAAPP, P.O. Box 18890, Jackson, MS 39217; FAX (601) 968-2499. ▼

Rev. Elder Perry on Advisory Board for "Christianity For The Third Millenium"

Rev. Elder Troy D. Perry, Founder and Moderator of the UFMCC, has accepted a position on the advisory board for "Christianity for the Third Millenium, Inc." The formation of the non-profit organization was announced the first week of February by the Rt. Rev. John S. Spong, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark.

The Organization was founded to offer a means whereby "twentieth and twenty-first century people can make Christ their Lord without sacrificing their minds," said Bishop Spong in his annual address to the Convention of the Diocese of Newark. Its purpose is to assist people in the task of "rescuing the Bible from the clutches of those media-happy fundamentalists who violate our intelligence and who use this sacred text to justify their prejudiced agenda,' the controversial Episcopal Bishop and author stated.

"Christianity for the Third Millenium" will produce a series of video presentations through which competent biblical scholarship will be made available to the average Sunday morning adult forum in Christian churches of all denominations in the English speaking world.

Its first public offerings will be videotapes of a debate between Bishop Spong and the Rev. Dr. John Stott, evangelical scholar of England, on the question of sexual ethics; a debate between Bishop Spong and a former member of the Rev. Pat Robertson's organization on the Authority of Scripture; and a presentation on how to answer children's questions about God featuring the Rev. Lucinda Laird. Most presentations will be accompanied by study guides.

The Board of Directors of the new organization includes members of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Newark as well as persons who are lapsed Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. One well-known Board member is Dr. Louie Crew, founder of Integrity. The advisory board includes Rev. Elder Perry, John Dockery of ABC Television, and Ned Jackson, Vice-President and General Manager, E.I. DuPont de Nemours & Co.

A catalog and price list of resources, including audio tapes, videotapes and print resources, is available by contacting, "Christianity for the Third Millenium" at P.O. Box 69, Morristown, NJ 07963-0069, or by faxing your request to 201/540-9584 or 908/637-4120. ▼

Rev. Shelley Hamilton...

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a number of African-Americas and Hispanics. The percentages of persons of colors reflects the demographics of Dallas. Among the clients are 50-60 women. Rev. Hamilton points out, "Most of the men are gay, but to my knowledge we're not serving any lesbians. Right now, they're all people with HIV/AIDS, although the Cathedral has worked with women with breast cancer and leukemia. We're just in the starting stages of our wellness program."

Rev. Hamilton states that her clients' biggest needs arise when they aren't sick enough to be in the hospital, but they're too sick to be at home alone. "People need a place to go, but they don't always meet the criteria for hospitalization, or hospice care." To help meet this need, she works closely with AIDS Services of Dallas, which has a residential program. This program provides individual living units for a wide diversity of people. "They provide patient care assistance at varying levels of illness. It's a diverse community with families, straight and gay, African-Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians. It's not a hospice, but people do live and die there."

The clients also have many financial needs, so the Cathedral provides a full-time HIV Advocate, Starr Eaddy. Her salary is funded by a grant, and she works hard at ensuring that the financial needs of persons with HIV/AIDS are met.

There are some differences in the needs of the women in Rev. Hamilton's program. "Most women I work with are from the street and are recovering from substance abuse. Many of them have been battered a lot. And women get sick from AIDS before ever being diagnosed, because the doctors aren't looking for it." But some of the women's needs are the same as men's. "The needs for food, housing and medicine are the same. The basic core of needs is so much the same in terms of the need for love, nurturing, and acceptance. Pain is pain, and there is a lot of pain."

Rev. Hamilton observes, "In the medical system, there are a lot of needs that have to be addressed. Women and gay men, if they don't have money or insurance, have a great deal of difficulty accessing services medically. It can take eight or nine hours just to see a doctor. An advocate helps."

Spiritual needs almost always surface as Rev. Hamilton, Ms. Eaddy and the Care Teams work with clients, many of whom are referred from local AIDS service agencies and are not members of the Cathedral of Hope. "We see no resistance to receiving help from a church," Rev. Hamilton reports. "In training sessions, I talk a lot about not being there to teach the Bible or to try to get people into church. But almost always, they'll ask something about God. It almost always surfaces in the context of worries about going to hell, or God's punishment."

Rev. Hamilton tells a story of one client with whom she has worked while he has been hospitalized for almost four months. "He has suffered so much, and has so much courage and hope. He told me his mother said she was worried for his soul. He's convinced himself it's not because he's gay, but because he's done a lot of drinking and drugging and hurting people. I told him, 'She's wrong, Guy. She's wrong.' I'm glad I wasn't there when she said that. I'm not sure what I would have done."

Working with so many people who are experiencing such suffering has had its effects on Rev. Hamilton's faith. "It has both deepened my faith, and cause more tension in my faith than anything I've ever experienced. I was never as intimately involved in the lives of people with AIDS as I am now. Intrinsically, it's changed me. I'm angry all the time. I draw strength from it. There's a lot to be angry about. What makes me angriest is that nobody knows the kind of suffering that people with AIDS go through. Nothing can be worse. On top of that, they have the gnawing fear that somehow they're at fault. That's what makes me want to start a revolution."

In reflecting on her faith, she continues, "I know that God is in the midst of all this. Jesus is in it. When I sit with someone or hold someone or pray with someone, I know that God is there. God can't stop what is happening, because if God could, God would. But God is doing whatever God can. When I put my hands on someone and pray with them, I know they experience something. I can see it and feel it. There is something passing from them to me and me to them."

In the future, Rev. Hamilton wants to establish a home, "not a nursing home, but a community home where abandoned people can have a community family environment, where they can get nurturing, love, and comfort. It's a goal, a dream, not only for people with AIDS, but all people who are disenfranchised. A goal for the entire program is that we develop a program that teaches people to integrate their spirituality with the things they do day to day."

Rev. Hamilton has learned some lessons since arriving in Dallas. "It never occurred to me when I was pastoring in New Orleans that I could write a grant that would fund a program that could provide services. If people are faced with needs in their church, small churches particularly, and they don't have the resources, then they should call Rev. Paul Tucker (here at the Cathedral) and he could advise them on grants that are available for services." Grants are available for churches providing clothes, food, or shelter, but not usually for anything around spirituality.

The AIDS Chaplain for the Cathedral stresses, "The need is growing. It isn't getting any less." She hopes that throughout the Fellowship, people will start aligning themselves with ACTUP, and become more demonstrative and militant around HIV/AIDS issues. "The reality is that it's not only about AIDS. What's happening around people with AIDS is indicative of a right-wing direction that our society is going in general. It can only help us globally, or cosmically for us to get out there."

Rev. Hamilton also believes that it's time for Christians to start praying and fasting. "Fasting is an ancient form of communication and receiving direction from God," she says. "It would behoove us all to do that. I would not encourage a person with AIDS to fast, but there are a lot of gay and lesbian Christians who don't have HIV."

Rev. Hamilton has long been recognized throughout the Fellowship for her bold, in-your-face ministry to disenfranchised persons, to people whose quality of life is at stake. She is continuing to grow in her ministry at the Cathedral of Hope, and is setting a standard for all of us in AIDS Ministry. ▼

Former MCC Clergy Conducts AIDS Services Research in U.K.

Art Ramirez, formerly an MCC pastor in San Jose, CA; Wichita, KS; and Bournemouth, England, has conducted a research project in England which is being used as a working document to improve services to clients in the East Berkshire District Health Authority.

The District is located thirty miles west of London, including Slough, Maidenhead, Royal Windsor, Ascot and Bracknell, and has a population of about 380,000, with 150 HIV/AIDS registered patients/clients. The study notes that the number of registered patients is so low due to the area's proximity to London.

Ramirez writes, "The study interviewed two interprofessional groups established by the District Health Authority to assess the needs and the demand for HIV/AIDS services, and also interviewed service users. The results showed that the interprofessional groups established a collaborative framework that provided a communication forum where better health and welfare provision was made available to HIV/AIDS clients. The clients highlight their major areas of concern: access to medical care; dying with dignity; access to alternative treatments; confidentiality; and adequate social and welfare provisions. The results of the research were useful in improving and developing HIV/AIDS health and welfare care provision in the District Health Authority."

Ramirez notes in the background to his report that access to medical care and health services in England is "almost universally available subject only to delays due to waiting lists for some services. HIV/AIDS clients obtained all medication free of charge from the Genito-Urinary Medicine Clinics. Until April of 1994, money for HIV/AIDS care and treatment was ring-fenced by the government providing for unlimited access to medicines and care facilities and health education/promotion. With the end of the ring-fencing, many agencies and departments dedicated to HIV/AIDS have been informed that after the 1st of April 1994, funding is no longer available, leading to the closure of many units and many health initiatives."

In his conclusion, Ramirez states, "It would be necessary to continue to review and monitor the needs of HIV/AIDS clients. The future of HIV/AIDS care is hindered by the bureaucratic maintenance by which funding decisions will be made. The collection of clients' health needs data is vital and essential to the planning, implementation and evaluation of HIV/AIDS services."

Ramirez wrote the research project for his masters degree in interprofessional health and welfare. He is now working on a research project for his Ph.D. study in Human Sexuality. ▼

Free Access to U.S. AIDS Research Databases

By Tadd Tobias **(Reprinted with permission from AIDS Treatment News, Issue #192, Feb. 4, 1994)**

The world's largest library of health sciences, the National Library of Medicine (NLM, a unit of the U.S. National Institutes of Health), will no longer charge access fees for three AIDS-related research databases and an online directory of information sources. This means that AIDS Organizations and public libraries can now offer their clients the ability to do a computer search of the medical literature to find extensive background information on almost any drug, condition, or other medical topic related to AIDS.

AIDSLINE, the most important of these databases, includes 90,000 references to AIDS-related journal articles, conference presentations, government reports, books, and audiovisuals.

Current users of AIDSLINE will no longer be charged if it is accessed directly through the NLM. New users must establish an account with the NLM to begin using the databases. Those organizations interested in using only the free databases may request a special password and user identification allowing free access. Organizations which also want to use other NLM databases (such as MEDLINE) must go through the standard registration process. They will have access to all the NLM databases, but will not be billed for using the AIDS-related ones. [Note: individuals are not eligible for the special free accounts, which are for community organizations and libraries. But individuals can still get free access, by opening a regular account, and then using the AIDS databases, which will not be charged for.]

In either case, users must have a computer and modem (or direct Internet access, usually through a local-area network at a university or other institution). The Grateful Med software which makes the system easier to use, is available in IBM and Macintosh formats for $29.95. To order this software, contact the National Technical Information Service, U.S. Department of Commerce, 5285 Port Royal Rd., Springfield, VA 22161; 800/423-9255.

For access to any of the databases, individuals and organizations must complete an application for a user identification and password. This application is included with the Grateful Med software package; alternatively, persons can obtain the application from MEDLARS (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System), National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, MD, 20894; 800/638-8480, fax 301/496-0822.

There are no long-distance telephone charges to use this service, because local numbers are available in most cities, through several data-communication networks. If there is no local number in your area, other arrangements can be made.

Anyone can use a computer and modem to access this extensive information collection from their office or home. AIDSLINE, AIDSTRIALS, AIDSDRUGS, and DIRLINE are four databases which are now being made available free.

AIDSTRIALS is an online computer database of about 500 clinical trials which are testing agents for use in treating HIV disease, or for use as a vacine. AIDSDRUGS describes approved and experimental treatments for HIV disease. The info in AIDSTRIALS and AIDSDRUGS is the same as by telephone from 800/TRIALS-A. ▼